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Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF OPERATIONAL STUDIES

TITLE: CULTURAL TERRAIN – MAPPING OUT THE FUTURE

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF OPERATIONAL STUDIES

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ACADEMIC YEAR 2006-2007

Mentor: Dr. B. Meyer
Approved: _____
Date: _____

Report Documentation Page	*Form Approved* *OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE **2007**	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED **00-00-2007 to 00-00-2007**

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Cultural Terrain - Mapping Out the Future**	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER
6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Development Command,Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street,Quantico,VA,22134-5068**	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER

9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Approved for public release; distribution unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

15. SUBJECT TERMS

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**	**Same as Report (SAR)**	**22**	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18

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CULTURAL BATTLESPACE – MAPPING OUT THE FUTURE

"It is far better to grow antennae than to grow horns"

-Attributed to Genghis Kahn

An expeditionary force operating in the littorals in the year 2020 may take on several forms. Operational Maneuver from the Sea, Ship to Objective Maneuver, Sea Basing, Distributed Operations, etc. are all conceptual forms derived to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the MAGTF in pursuit of U.S. strategic objectives in the future. By 2025, it is expected that 80% of the world's population will live in urban centers within the littorals (Anonymous, 2006). Given this statistic, the MAGTF will certainly see military key terrain of the future made up of populations and cultures, not just geography. As the Marine Corps increasingly finds itself conducting small wars in populated urban centers in support of US interests, it will more and more find itself engaged in a battle of ideas, with a neutral, foreign population being the prize required for victory. Consideration of any population as key terrain needs to be an additive planning measure to any concept of employing the future MAGTF. Through education, Marines will be able to employ cultural mapping and rapid ethnography to win the population as key terrain and achieve better understanding of the operating environment and the enemy in future MAGTF operations .

War is fundamentally an interactive social process

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Much as the nature of war is immutable, the nature of humans is perceived as unchanging as well (Descartes, 1979). For this reason, it is beneficial for the Marine Corps to formalize its education regarding the nature of humans in future conflict. The future environment in which the MAGTF will find itself operating has many complex and willful players. The MAGTF is currently posturing for the future by preparing for "Forward Presence, Security Cooperation, Counterterrorism, Crisis Response, Forcible Entry, Prolonged Operations and Counterinsurgency" (Marine, 2006, p. 11). Operating successfully in these environments requires an ability to understand all stakeholders' motives and actions to a certain degree, and to understand how each fits into the overall environment. Whether the MAGTF finds itself doing distributed disaster relief operations or lethal forcible entry operations, it will increasingly find itself dealing with foreign civilians, enemy combatants of several flavors, non-governmental agencies, coalition partners, third party nations, criminal elements, international media, treaty organizations, etc. As commanders and Marines call for "more culture" while operating in this complex environment, it is important to define just what a culture is and how to describe a culture in terms of the contemporary operational environment.

According to U.S. Army Field Manual 2-0 (May, 2004), the contemporary operational environment (COE) is made up of 11 critical variables. These variables are:

a. Physical Environment

b. Nature and Stability of the State

c. Sociological Demographics

d. Regional and Global Relationships

    e.   Military Capabilities

    f.   Information

    g.   Technology

    h.   External Organizations

    i.   National Will

    j.   Time

    k.   Economics

    l.   *Culture*

Culture will be the focus of this discussion and should be added to Marine Corps doctrine as the twelfth critical variable of the operating environment. Culture is not encompassed in any of the preceding variables, though like the others, it affects each variable in a unique manner. An ability to understand the 12 critical variables as components of the COE is central to understanding how best to remain effective in a complex expeditionary environment. The ability to achieve understanding of culture cannot be developed without a significant investment in education for the Marine Corps' fighters, leaders and planners. When culture is added to the critical variables of the operating environment, so too must come additional educational tools to come to grips with understanding and exploiting this segment of the complex battlefield.

In order to understand educational techniques for the future MAGTF, it is first necessary to discuss the actual component parts of any culture in a structured and simplified manner. Each culture has much in common with other cultures; human nature is immutable, but the manner in which humans organize and evolve culturally is constantly changing. Marines can

employ a variety of methods, particularly in the anthropology discipline, to break down a culture into component parts with the purpose of identifying leverage points to assist in MAGTF operations at all levels of war during all spectrums of conflict. Cultural mapping is a technique that dissects a culture according to rules, mores and norms (Powell, 1985). A MAGTF served by Officers and Marines that can conduct cultural mapping during planning and execution will be better able to conduct combined effects operations to achieve their aims because they will be able to quickly apply their strengths to reinforce or exploit cultural seams within their operating environment.

The first step to cultural mapping is to understand the common pitfalls experienced in western culture when confronted with foreign cultures. It is important that we constantly practice our skills mapping out our own culture, and sub cultures within, to be more aware of these pitfalls. Just as in other cultures, there are seams and unrecognized biases that can cripple the Marine attempting to map a foreign culture, because no matter how hard he tries, he is shaped in everything he does by the culture from which he comes. This event is seen routinely in such simple comparisons in the US as "country boy versus city slicker," "Yankee and Johnny Reb," etc. It is important to understand the lens through which one has been raised to see the world and cope with the fact that it will never completely go away. (Cultural apperception is an earned skill, and provides a full, conscious understanding of the bias and perceptions we bring to the environment. The first common pitfall for the Marine is ethnocentricity. Ethnocentricity is the belief, conscious or sub-conscious, that one's own ethnic identity is superior to the others with whom he is in contact (Rusen, 2004). All humans innately exist in an ethnocentric environment; otherwise cultural confidence and

cultural survival skills would wane. This is simply a human survival mechanism. It is very easy to unwittingly apply values to another culture's practices such as female circumcision (Gruenbaum, 2005), cannibalism (Whitehead, 2000), tribalism (Piggott, 2005), etc. and assume that one's own culture is morally or physically superior. These facets of the foreign culture have evolved for a reason, and one would do well to find out *why* they developed and what they mean rather than to pass judgment. Projection of one's values on another culture (Sigelman, & Tuch, 1997) is the main manifestation of ethnocentricity. What are the things that a man would kill for? Why would a woman risk her and her family's life? These are all actions that are motivated by a particular value system. Cultures commonly have very different value systems. It is imperative to avoid thinking in terms of one's own values alone when mapping another culture. Should the Marine apply his own values to the mechanics of a foreign society, cultural mapping will not be nearly as effective.

The second most common pitfall in cultural mapping is known as "mirror imaging." Mirror imaging differs from ethnocentricity in the sense that it does not apply a "better-worse" value to cultures; rather, mirror imaging is when someone applies his mores and decision making process/intuition to the other culture (Clarke, 2000). This is simply stating "I would do things this way, so he must also think the same." One must constantly be aware of mirror imaging when mapping a culture. It is impossible to eliminate, but one can minimize and recognize mirror imaging in an effort to increase the benefit of the cultural mapping battle drill.

The third most common pitfall is racism. Racism is closely tied to ethnocentrism in that it implies superiority of race, but it differs in that ethnocentrism implies superiority of culture, or ethnicity, despite race. Cultures are not bounded by race, creed or religion alone. Racism is not just rude colloquialisms for another race, or a common argument in a hiring/firing law suit. It is far more subtle and all humans exist with an element of racism in them, primarily driven by unfamiliarity. Racism is not a bad word that implies hatred either. It simply means that an individual has (usually unwittingly) passed judgment on the unfamiliar. The overt forms of racism, such as slurs and denigration, only serve as additional obstacles to effective cultural mapping and are negatively contagious to those around.

Stereotyping is the last of the most common pitfalls in cultural mapping. How many Americans would group the values and cultures of Persians and Arabs or Chinese, Koreans, Japanese and Thais? Stereotyping is caused when one fails to accept a new "bin" in his organization of various cultures. He instead takes superficial traits, be they physical, action-oriented, religious or linguistic, and groups them with another completely different cultural form. Once the subject is placed in the wrong "bin" in the cultural organizational warehouse, only further mistakes in cultural mapping can be expected. For example, the average American when asked to describe an Asian is rarely inclined to explain ethnic groupings stretching from Belurussia to China, Saudi Arabia to Mongolia. Rather, he will conjure an image of someone of Chinese, Korean or Japanese descent.

When learning how to conduct cultural mapping and rapid ethnography, one can learn from the anthropology discipline. Anthropologists have spent generations formulating theories

and concepts related to organizing the facets of a culture to be understood by an outsider. Cultures consist of groups of humans whose nature is unchanging, enabling one to break down the nature of cultures into their component parts to identify differences in their forms of culture. When conducting a study of any culture, it is important to avoid any attempt at perfectionism. In fact, if one ends up being twenty percent correct on his cultural assessments, he should be confident that he has done quite well. Cultures are complex and ever-adapting, which serves as a moving target that is impossible to hit in the "V" ring. Because of this, one must plan for feedback to the assessments made in cultural mapping. Mechanisms must be in place to aggressively attempt to disprove any assertions made during a cultural study, so the work becomes increasingly more accurate. Without this assessment process, one is bound to fall into all of the aforementioned pitfalls.

The second step in mapping a culture is to identify the cultural form. Anthropologists have defined multiple cultural forms that can serve as further "bins" in which to place subjects. This list of cultural forms is not all inclusive (nothing in the study of cultures is), but rather serves as a way to rapidly come to an understanding of the cultural form. In addition, a culture may represent multiple cultural forms in the same region. Cultural forms can be the following:

- Tribal: Primarily existing in non-state regions, values focused on the smaller unit of society. Power derived from tangible assets. A contemporary example of this cultural form is that of the Siberian tribes resident in the former Soviet Union, referred to as the "Northern Peoples" by western academics and Soviet Scholars, who

had little appreciation of the "age old practices" of tribal vengeance, blood money and arranged marriages of minors (Bartels & Bartels, 2006).

- Feudal: Tribes form into clans for mass, which enables protection from smaller tribes. Power is derived from local trade and followers. The ability to project power exists. Hungary is a great example of a feudal society existing into the end of the nineteenth century.(Munz, 2002)

- Agrarian: Dispersion caused by agrarian economy causes decentralized values, however intangible expenses (credit and paper money) increase prestige. Individualism is more overt. Current day Colombia provides a look at how agrarian societies can react uniquely to conflict and conflict resolution, with the agrarian population being both the center of gravity and the main victims in a regional conflict.(Escohar, 2000)

- Industrial: Large groups of homogenous populations are tempered with cultural shifting and mixing and collusion. Paper money and credit are supreme sources of power. State is the arbiter. An example of an industrial culture is that of urban dwellers in 20th century Europe. A centralized state has a large influence regarding the mobilization of the population, but when a state fails, the industrial culture has a drastic, immediate breakdown of social organization.

- Information: Still emerging societal structure, but indicates a decentralized interface. Non physical relationships can stretch over distances man cannot. Cultures learn from each other, pulling strengths from their contacts. Two-way assimilation is often referred to as "globalism." This structure may take on the characteristics of the Cosmopolitan movement in 19th Century Europe (Sifneos, 2005). Within an

information society, the economy is mature and economic growth occurs at a slower

rate than that of an industrial society (Watanabe, Tou, Takahashi, & Shum, 2006).

The next stage of cultural mapping requires one to study a culture's value system. What

would motivate a man in this culture to kill another human? For what cause would one risk

his and other's lives? The best resource to quickly map a culture's values is to look towards

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Halepota, 2005). Each individual within a culture will have

identifiable value aspects, tempered by where they reside on the hierarchy of needs. Since a

man in need of food for survival can be counted on to fight for it in any culture (human
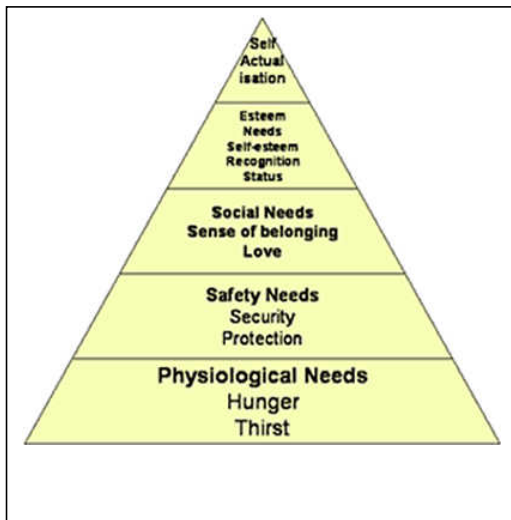
 nature is immutable), his low position on the

hierarchy makes him easier to understand

and influence. From Maslow's perspective,

the more humans prosper, the more one must

understand their culture to find their

motivations for action. In addition to

referencing Maslow, one can identify certain

emotional beliefs, such as religion, politics

and racism that may affect the value system

of a culture. There exists no silver bullet to

identify a culture's values, but an attempt to codify them is an important step to mapping out

the culture.

The next step to cultural mapping and rapid ethnography is the *perspectives battle drill*. Admittedly more arduous during rapid ethnography due to the multiple players, this drill is crucial to the beginning of cultural understanding. The drill involves four questions that center around the etic and emic perspectives of a culture. Etic is a perspective of a culture from an outsider of that culture, and emic is a perspective of a culture from an insider of that culture (Banton, 2004). To conduct the perspective battle drill, one simply needs to corral a pencil and paper and write out the following four questions, and brainstorm the answers as broadly as possible:

- How would I describe his culture? (Etic)

- How would he describe my culture? (Etic)

- How would I describe my culture? (Emic)

- How would he describe his culture? (Emic)

This drill can be practiced easily with coalition partners overseas via email, or even in web based chat rooms to increase the skill. This is a critical skill to understanding a foreign culture, and may be the only drill for which an operator has time. The bottom line is that the *perspectives battle drill* is the most time effective technique for cultural mapping available to the Marine.

Identifying cognitive heuristics is another tool useful for cultural mapping and rapid ethnography. Cognitive heuristics are merely cultural shortcuts germane to a group, but not recognized by that group. (Kopelman & Davis, 2004) Outsiders notice the heuristics instantly and tend to focus on them to the exclusion of more concrete facets of a culture. An example of this is how Americans use the horn in the car. A long, loud blast connotes irritation at

other drivers, while two short blasts serves as a greeting. To the average American, it is taken for granted; while an outsider driving in America may be wholly confused by this cognitive heuristic. It is important to seek out one's own cognitive heuristics and recognize those of the cultures one is mapping. This will help mitigate unexpected clashes in communication and meaning when interfacing with other cultures.

The next step is to define the social structures of a culture within one's own abilities and biases. All societies have structure, though they take on many forms. Possible social structures are the following:

- Power structures: Who or which entity controls the reigns of power? What is power? Is it the state that alone holds the legitimate use of physical power? Is it gender, currency, rhetoric, physical attributes, resources, geographic position, age? A caricature of an informal power broker would be the "town crier" depicted in John Hersey's classic novel *A Bell For Adano* (1944). Can we identify the source of the power in a society? Identify who is deferred to for decision-making and find what is in common with these people or groups, and one is well on the way to identifying the sources of power. A Marine does not have to think for long about how knowledge of sources of power in a society can be used to a military advantage.

- Economics: There are two economies existent in all cultures. Formal economies are those that are sanctioned by those that hold the power, and informal ones that exist as "black markets" (Looney, 2006). An example of a formal economy is the fuel market in the US, and an informal economy would be that of illegal software production in Asia. Understanding the economics, both formal and informal, in a culture or cross

culturally will help to clarify values, particularly those that people are willing to risk security for and those that are descriptions of the power holders' value system.

- Communications: What are the principle mediums used for formal and informal communications in a society? As a technologically advanced western culture, we tend to overlook what is often the most enduring communication of cultural identity, those of history, song, dance, art, religious text, etc. What are the means with which a culture retains its identity amongst the bombardment of other cultures via radio, TV and internet? How do schools communicate to the future power brokers – plays, concerts, games on the playground? Cast your net widely on communications to find the most resonant cultural communications means.

- Religion: What religions are espoused and shunned in the culture? What are the over arching themes and messages with these religions? This will help better understand values and decision processes.

- Linguistics: What are the peculiarities of the language, and which language is it derived from or derive from it? Which is the most effective means of teaching the language? Is the written form different? What is unique about linguistics in any way? A shortcut is to look at the cultural etymology of such words as "enemy," "friend," and descriptions of family and values. Place and geographic names can also be clues to sociolinguistics. Like reading music, which broadens one's outlook by allowing expression in another medium, languages cause a convention that prompt people to solve a problem differently than if they spoke another tongue.

- Semiotics: What are the visual signs that depict a culture? Does a handshake mean the same thing in Borneo? What are the origins and significance of gang signs in Los Angeles compared to Chicago?

- Education: What age is writing taught? Is the system formal or informal? What are the cornerstones of successful education in the culture? What are the means of education, including aural, written and teacher to student relationships.

- Legends and Lore : What are the stories that the elders pass on? The Alamo, the ant and the grasshopper, Paul Bunyan, etc are all indications of a value system to be strived for in the younger population. Much of a culture's history is passed on, and revised, through the legends and lore.

- Rites of passage: What landmarks in age or society call for a rite of passage? What makes a boy a man, or a girl a woman? Rites can be associated with a culture for boundless events, and they can all provide good insight to the cultural values.

- Heroes and villains: What makes a hero and what makes a villain? What are the values of each that are passed on in the history, legends and lore. Is a vigilante a hero or a villain? What actions warrant formal valor awards, and how do those actions differ from your heroic values?

- Geography: Location affects much in a culture. Coastal regions populated by fishermen contrasted with the farmer or alpine family will have nuances worth notice.

- Demographic factors: Plotting graphically such factors as a youth bulge, wealth distribution, urbanization, health care system, age distribution, migration, crime,

ethnicity will help further the understanding of cultural components to assist in
military operations.

Rapid ethnography and cultural mapping are skills easily achieved, but the training and
education are time intensive. All Marines must be exposed to this education in order to
increase our effectiveness in the key terrain of the future, the civilian population.

The USMC must begin early education of Marines in recognizing and mapping the
aforementioned components of a culture and providing opportunities for practical application
and debrief. It is not important that a specific culture be studied, merely that our students
fully explore examples of the components of a culture and get to practice; whether it is in
Alabama or Albania. At a minimum, Marines should be advised of the pitfalls discussed
herein. Subsequent training would educate Marines on the various cultural forms and social
structures. Ideally, training would also include practical techniques such as perspectives
battle drill, value system evaluation, and cognitive heuristic identification. In peacetime,
Marines would get instant emic feedback from their subjects as a reflection of their success,
and planners would get an opportunity to consider cultural understanding as another arm in
their combined arms toolbox.

Through educating Marines in the skills of cultural mapping and rapid ethnography, the
MAGTF can develop organic Officers and Marines who are able to rapidly achieve
understanding of the key terrain represented by foreign cultures and the operational
environment throughout the spectrum of conflict.

The purpose of this research project is to highlight the necessity of cultural mapping skills
development in the Marine Corps. The proposed training curriculum presented here

encompasses only a few of the cultural mapping techniques available to the Marine Corps borrowed from the field of anthropology. It should be used as a springboard for a well-crafted, thorough education program on rapid ethnography.

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Formatted: German (Germany)

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		FORM APPROVED - - - OMB NO. 0704-0188	
public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington headquarters services, directorate for information operations and reports, 1215 Jefferson davis highway, suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the office of management and budget, paperwork reduction project (0704-0188) Washington, dc 20503			
1. AGENCY USE ONLY (*LEAVE BLANK*)	2. **05/16/05**	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED *STUDENT RESEARCH PAPER*	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **CULTURAL TERRAIN – MAPPING OUT THE FUTURE** **TOOLS FOR THE FUTURE MAGTF STAFF AND LEADERS**		5. FUNDING NUMBERS *N/A*	
6. AUTHOR(S) **MAJOR DANIEL A. SCHMITT, USMC**			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) *USMC COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE* *2076 SOUTH STREET, MCCDC, QUANTICO, VA 22134-5068*		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER *NONE*	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) *SAME AS #7.*		10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER: *NONE*	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES *NONE*			
12A. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT *NO RESTRICTIONS*		12B. DISTRIBUTION CODE *N/A*	
13. ABSTRACT (*MAXIMUM 200 WORDS*) **AS THE MARINE CORPS INCREASINGLY FINDS ITSELF CONDUCTING SMALL WARS IN POPULATED URBAN CENTERS IN SUPPORT OF US INTERESTS, IT WILL INCREASINGLY FIND ITSELF ENGAGED IN A BATTLE OF IDEAS, WITH A NEUTRAL, FOREIGN POPULATION BEING THE PRIZE REQUIRED FOR VICTORY. CONSIDERATION OF AN POPULATION AS KEY TERRAIN NEEDS TO BE AN ADDITIVE PLANNING MEASURE TO ANY CONCEPT OF EMPLOYING THE FUTURE MAGTF. THROUGH EDUCATION, MARINES WILL BE ABLE TO EMPLOY CULTURAL MAPPING AND RAPID ETHNOGRAPHY TO WIN THE POPULATION AS KEY TERRAIN AND ACHIEVE BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE OPERATING ENVIRONMENT AND THE ENEMY IN FUTURE MAGTF OPERATIONS.**			
14. SUBJECT TERMS (KEY WORDS ON WHICH TO PERFORM SEARCH) **CULTURE, CULTURAL MAPPING, RAPID ETHNOGRAPHY, ETHNOCENTRICITY, MILITARY ANTRHROPOLOGY**		15. NUMBER OF PAGES: **15**	
		16. PRICE CODE: N/A	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT *UNCLASSIFIED*	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE: *UNCLASSIFIED*	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT *UNCLASSIFIED*	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT